

Masthead Logo

The Iowa Review

Volume 17
Issue 1 *Winter*

Article 4

1987

A Cool Evening in September

J. V. Brummels

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Recommended Citation

Brummels, J. V. "A Cool Evening in September." *The Iowa Review* 17.1 (1987): 4-5. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.3447>

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I know these four walls, then, of the room
which is corporeal life: a kitten, a son,
another Son, an African animal without soul,
and I know, too, that another wall stands,
its door open, and something beyond beckons
to me to pass through. Finally, I know
that the pentagram is the devil's sign.

So I have made my beginning, will relate
my parable, and give benediction
in the name of the Holy Family: the blood
of the Son, the pure, passionless Mother,
the Father in whose fist is clenched our fate.

A COOL EVENING IN SEPTEMBER

I close the kitchen door on the chill
breeze and sit back down at the table.
Her ear is a punctured half-moon.
From the lobe dangles a silver star.
My eye aches down the long curve
of her neck and shoulder, the snowflake
purity of the blouse's white sleeve,
rests on the cast snake that circles her wrist.
Her brown hand's around a sweating glass.
The light glints off her nails like frost.
Our conversation is as brittle as ice,
as still as legal papers, and makes me
formal in my faded jeans and flannel shirt.
Yes I've lost weight. OK I look good.
No there's not much here for fall colors
with the trees so few and the culture here
is pretty much the bars and television.
At least, that's the part she'd recognize.

What is it in us that makes us want
to preserve a dead marriage in this ice?

I move to the enameled sideboard. *Yes
I've always been good at freshening drinks.
Yes I may be the only man who keeps a
pickle jar of margueritas in the fridge
but I doubt it.* I answer with my back
to her. I clasp her glass in a shivering
left hand, fight the urge
to lift the rim to my lips. Ice is
January in my right hand, in her glass.
Tequila is February thaw, a slow week
of temperatures in the forties, the steady
melt of accumulated frost and ice
in the joints, layer after layer of snow
coming to face the sun again,
each with its history of tracks of animals,
the shapes of the wind's velocity and direction,
until, standing in the mud, above
a soggy autumn leaf, I recognize

in its brittle veins the origins of love.
I turn and finally, for once, meet her eyes.

SOMETHING FOR THE TELLING

"An old cowpoke went riding out . . ."

In each telling the madness of it
comes on me again—the sledgehammer
pulse, the crystalline night vision.
Even now in my old age my nostrils
flare to the smell of tequila
at the thought, my throat thickens
in each telling, and the piebald hand
that rests on my stick steadies again.